

Testimony of Phil Sherwood
Deputy Director of the
Connecticut Citizen Action Group
March 2, 2009

Good afternoon members of the Insurance & Real Estate, Human Services and Public Health Committees. My name is Phil Sherwood and I am the Deputy Director of the Connecticut Citizen Action Group (CCAG). CCAG has approximately 25,000 members and is currently the state's oldest and largest public interest group. CCAG strongly endorses HB6600 AAC The Establishment Of The Sustinet Plan.

We all know it's getting tougher to get good, affordable health care no matter how hard we work. Even when one takes responsibility for themselves and their families and makes good choices, there is still no guarantee they will have quality, affordable health care that they can count on.

Skyrocketing health care costs are crippling state and local government budgets, stalling job growth, and making it more difficult than ever to afford the health care a family needs while making ends meet. Never has the link between our broken health care system and the economy been more apparent.

A recent health care study showed that health insurance premiums in Connecticut have been increasing more than 8 times faster than wages and every 30 seconds someone else in the United States declares bankruptcy due in part to medical costs.

Too many individuals have been left at the mercy of private insurance companies with no other choice. Sustinet offers comprehensive reform that includes the choice of a public health insurance plan so we're no longer at the mercy of the private insurance industry.

Sustinet is more than another bill name for health care reform. Sustinet establishes a clear set of principles that define quality, affordable health care for all. It recognizes that a critical component to health care reform is having the choice of a public health insurance plan that will guarantee families peace of mind and that is guaranteed to be there when you need it.

Sustinet will establish:

Coverage You Can Afford

- ✦ Health coverage that is affordable for every person, family, and business.
- ✦ Coverage with premiums and out-of-pocket costs based on your ability to pay.
- ✦ Government acts as a watchdog, setting and enforcing rules so private insurance companies can't deny coverage or raise rates based on health history, age, or gender.

Comprehensive Benefits You Can Count On

- ✦ Standard, comprehensive health care benefits that meet your needs from preventative to chronic care.
- ✦ Low out-of-pocket costs (like co-pays) so you can afford to get medical care when you need it.

Choice of Private or Public Health Insurance Plan

- ✦ Keep your current private insurance plan or join a new public health insurance plan.
- ✦ The choice of a new public health insurance plan is a guaranteed backup that will always be there to ensure quality, affordable health care coverage no matter what.

Equal Access to Quality Care

- ✦ Equity in health care access, treatment, research, and resources to people and communities of color and strengthen health services in low-income communities.

There are some who believe that government should have no role in guaranteeing quality affordable health care and that it should be left to the whims of the private markets. The Sustinet Plan understands the need for individuals to have the choice of a public health insurance plan so that we:

- ✦ Have a guaranteed backup that will be there no matter what happens.
- ✦ Have guaranteed, standard, comprehensive benefits that meet our needs.
- ✦ Can afford health insurance based on our ability to pay.
- ✦ No longer have to watch our hard earned money go to paying high CEO salaries and corporate profits.

Rather than government acting as a lap dog when the companies charge whatever they want and drop coverage for those that need it the most, the public expects government to act as a watchdog of the insurance industry.

Private insurance companies have continued to fail consumers. There needs to be another choice. People also know that the insurance companies' huge profits and negative practices, like denying insurance to people with pre-existing conditions, have stifled health care reform. Private insurance companies currently have little incentive to control health care premiums and deductibles, reaping huge profits while working families struggle to pay the bills. A public health insurance plan such as Sustinet that competes directly with private insurers will help control health care costs for Connecticut's families.

Thank you for your time.

Phil Sherwood,
Deputy Director
Connecticut Citizen Action Group